

The outlines of the handouts on the *Two Truths* that are written in capital letters are from Lama Tsongkhapa's ***Illumination of the Thought***.

Tibetan: དབུ་མ་དགོངས་པ་རབ་གསལ། – *Uma Gong pa Rab Sael* (*Uma* = middle, *Gong pa* = thought/intend,

Rab = best/ highest/ as an intensifier: very, *Sael* = illuminate/clarify)

Illumination of the Thought is a commentary of Chandrakirti's ***Supplement to the Middle Way / Engaging in the Middle Way***.

Tibetan: དབུ་མ་ལ་རྟུག་པ། - *Uma la Jug pa* (*Uma* = middle, *la* = in, *Jug pa* = engage/enter)

Supplement to/Engaging in the Middle Way in turn is a commentary of Nagarjuna's ***Fundamental Wisdom***.

Tibetan: དབུ་མ་རྩ་བ་ཤེས་རབ། - *Uma Tsa wa She rab* (*Uma* = middle, *Tsa wa* = root/fundamental/basic,

She rab = wisdom)

EXPLAINING, BY MEANS OF THE CATEGORY OF THE TWO TRUTHS, THAT ALL PHENOMENA HAVE TWO ENTITIES

Chandrakirti starts his presentation of the two truths in the sixth chapter of his ***Supplement of the Middle Way*** with the following stanza:

*All phenomena, because of being found by perceivers of the perfect truth
And by perceivers of falsehood, uphold two entities.
The object of perfect perception is suchness,
While that of false perception is taught to be conventional truth.*

The Buddha taught that all phenomena (such as 'internal' consciousness and 'external' sprout, etc.) have two entities or natures – conventional truth and ultimate truth. While phenomena do not have *inherently existent* entities, all phenomena must have entities in order to exist. Therefore, a single entity such as a sprout has a conventional and an ultimate entity.

However, this does not mean that the sprout *is* the two truths, i.e. that the sprout is a conventional truth from the perspective of an ordinary person and an ultimate truth from the perspective of an Arya being.

Regarding the ultimate truth: the ultimate truth of, for instance, the sprout is what is found by the exalted wisdom that directly realizes the actual reality (the perfect truth) of the sprout. This exalted wisdom realizes the actual reality or the ultimate truth of the sprout by realizing the sprout's emptiness of existing ultimately or truly. However, it is important to understand that the sprout's emptiness of existing ultimately or truly is *also* empty of existing ultimately or truly. Therefore, even though the sprout's emptiness of being ultimately or truly existent does not ultimately/truly exist, it is nevertheless found or realized by that wisdom.

The meditative equipoise that realizes the sprout's emptiness is a mind of ultimate analysis which when it looks for the sprout does not find the sprout but the sprout's emptiness of existing ultimately/truly. If that meditative equipoise were to find the sprout, the sprout would have to exist ultimately/truly.

Regarding the conventional truth: a conventional truth (such as the sprout) is found or realized by conventional valid cognizers that exist in the continua of those whose awarenesses are completely covered by the 'clouded vision of the cataract of ignorance'. Those valid cognizers are conventional cognizers because the objects that they realize are false in that they appear to those cognizers to exist ultimately/truly.

However, the sprout that is found by those conventional valid cognizers nevertheless *exists*, for it is 'dependent arising', i.e. it exists in dependence on causes and conditions, its parts, and a mind perceiving it.

Please note that even though conventional valid cognizers find or realize conventional truths, for they realize sprouts, colors, consciousness, actions etc., they do not necessarily realize an object *to be* a conventional truth.

In order to realize an object to be a conventional truth, one must have realized that object to be false or deceptive, the realization of which must be preceded by the realization of that object's emptiness/ultimate truth.

ANOTHER PRESENTATION OF THE TWO TRUTHS

The category of the two truths and the basis of that category:

Object of knowledge (which is equivalent to 'existent', 'phenomenon', 'object of comprehension', etc.) can be categorized into the two truths, conventional and ultimate truth.

English: Object of knowledge, Tibetan: ཤེས་ཀྱི། - *She ja* (*She* = know, *ja* = object)

From the ***Sutra of Father and Son's Meeting***:

Thus the Tathagatha comprehends the conventional and the ultimate truths. What is to be known too is confined to this conventional and the ultimate truth alone. These, in turn, the Blessed One clearly perceived, clearly knew, and excellently actualized to be emptiness. Therefore, he is referred to as the omniscient.

The meaning of the sutra is that the Tathagatha is omniscient because he simultaneously comprehends the two truths. Further, the category of the two truths is definite in number because an 'object of knowledge' is exhausted within this twofold category. This means that there are not more than two truths and that the two truths cannot be condensed into less than two truths. Therefore, whatever is an object of knowledge must be one of the two truths and whatever is one of the two truths must be an object of knowledge.

Even though 'object of knowledge' and 'existent' are equivalent, 'object of knowledge' is explained here to be the basis of the category of the two truths (object of knowledge is that which is categorized or divided into the two truths). It is explained to be the basis of the category of the two truths in order to avoid the wrong view that the ultimate truth is not an object of knowledge, i.e. that the ultimate truth cannot be known.

This wrong view arises from misinterpreting the following quotes:

From the ***Sutra of Father and Son's Meeting***:

The conventional is seen by the Tathagatha as that which the world is involved with. That which is the ultimate is inexpressible, it is not an object of knowledge, it is not an object of detailed knowledge, it is not an object of thorough knowledge, it is not shown.

Shantideva reflects on the above sutra quote in his ***Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life***:

*The ultimate is not an object of perception of awareness
Awareness is declared to be conventional*

The actual meaning of those passages is that the ultimate truth is not apprehended by a dualistic direct perceiver and is therefore not the object of knowledge or the object of perception of such a perceiver. If the ultimate truth was not an object of knowledge, i.e. it could not be known, it would contradict the earlier quote from the ***Sutra of Father and Son's Meeting*** which states that the Tathagatha is omniscient because he simultaneously comprehends the two truths.

Furthermore, the line "*Awareness is declared to be conventional*" is not saying that only awarenesses are conventional truths but that also the objects of conventional awarenesses are conventional truths.

The relationship between the two truths:

The two truths are one entity or nature. However, they are not one, for they are different, distinct phenomena. The fact that the two truths are different phenomena but have one entity or nature refers to the two truths *in relation to* a particular phenomenon. It does not mean that every conventional truth is one entity with every ultimate truth. For instance, the sprout is a conventional truth and the sprout's emptiness of being ultimately or truly existent is the sprout's ultimate truth. Therefore, the ultimate truth of the sprout is a characteristic or an attribute of the conventional truth, the sprout. In this way the conventional truth, the sprout, and the sprout's ultimate truth are different phenomena but have one nature or entity. For instance, the impermanence, the shape and the color of a car are all characteristics or attributes of the car. Therefore, the car is one entity with its impermanence, its shape and its color.

